11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MD 1

Arabic-speaking Moslem might take a special pride in the peculiar relation of the Arabs to Islam, and in the dimly-remembered splendours of the early Caliphates, it is safe to say that normally he did not distinguish his being an Arab from his being a Moslem, and even when he did so it was the latter which was foremost in his thought and life.

3

For over a thousand years the majority of the population of Syria had been Moslem. There was not, however, complete unanimity in matters of religious belief. On the one hand, besides the Sunni or orthodox Moslems there were several heterodox Islamic and semi-Islamic sects: Shi'is, Druzes, Alawis and Isma'ilis. On the other hand, there still survived a number of Christian sects, Catholic, Greek Orthodox and others, which had come into existence in the early centuries of the Church's history; and there were in addition a comparatively small number of Jews.

Some of these communities were scattered throughout the country, while others possessed a local predominance in certain parts of it. Most of the districts held by these compact minorities were mountainous. The Lebanese mountains in particular were the homes of dissident communities, either because it was easier for the long-established inhabitants of Lebanon than for their neighbours of the plains to resist the pressure of Islamization, or else because sects which had grown up in the plains migrated to the mountains as an asylum where they would not be molested, or if attacked could better defend themselves. These mountain communities were marked by an especially unbending particularism and resistance to influences from outside.

4

Christians and Jews were left to carry on their own communal life without disturbance. For this there were two main reasons. The first was the Islamic doctrine in regard to Christianity and Judaism. Just as the Moslem regulated his life in accordance with the principles of his faith, so he did not deny a similar right to the Christians.

Moslems are not taught by their faith to regard Christians as inherently inferior, since it is in their power to become Moslems, and so enter the community of true believers in

which the only distinction is that of piety; nor as adherents of a false religion, since Islam considers Jesus to have been one of the succession of true prophets. They regard them as having gone astray, first in taking the revelation of Jesus as the final and complete revelation, and secondly in looking upon Jesus not simply as a prophet, a man through whom God's word has come to mankind, but as God incarnate. It is the doctrine of the Incarnation, and therefore also the doctrine of the Trinity, which are for Moslems the stumbling-blocks in Christianity. As 'People of the Book', believers in God, in prophecy and in the Day of Judgement, Christians like Jews are to be tolerated and to be allowed a certain status by the side of the Islamic community. But they cannot be regarded as members of that community. Nor can a Moslem willingly acquiesce in subjection to a non-Moslem Government, although his own weakness may compel a temporary submission.

Such is the attitude towards Christians which Islam enjoins: an attitude of reasoned and well-defined tolerance. But it is not surprising that there should during the thousand years of almost unchallenged Moslem supremacy have been periods of persecution, nor that the ordinary Moslem should have come to feel a certain contempt for the Eastern Christians who were the only Christians he knew: the contempt which he who knows himself to be strong feels for those in his power, and which he who believes himself to possess the truth feels for those who have rejected it.

The other reason for the persistence of the Christian and Jewish communities was the existence of a certain view of the State: a view which was universally accepted in western Asia, and indeed far beyond it, until recent generations. According to this view the Government existed to defend the cultivated lands, to maintain order, to tax their populations, and for nothing more. The laws by which the life of the individual and of society was regulated sprang not from positive enactment of the ruler but from the religious doctrines and ancestral customs to which individual and society adhered. It is true that since the ruling power was Moslem by faith, the Moslem religious law and the courts had a special relation to the Government. But a Moslem would no more have thought of compelling Christians and Jews to conform to Moslem law in matters of personal life and relationships than they of

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria M DI

abandoning their own religious codes. Law was personal. Not simply was there no concept of equality before the law; there was no idea of sameness.

For these reasons, throughout the period of Arab and Ottoman rule the Christians and Jews were allowed a certain autonomy. Each sect formed a community, or as it was called in Arabic a 'millah' and in Turkish a 'millet', within the State and co-terminous with it. In matters affecting the community, the Government treated with it as a whole through its heads, and not with the members of it individually. Certain civil functions were devolved upon the spiritual heads and representative bodies of the communities. They were allowed to administer the property and institutions of their communities and to decide matters of personal status—marriage, divorce, inheritance and so on—in accordance with the tenets of their faith.

This system originated long before the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. It developed gradually and was only formalized in the nineteenth century by a series of Imperial edicts. Throughout the period of Moslem ascendancy it succeeded in preserving self-respect and a sense of community among the religious minorities, although it may also have helped to perpetuate bitterness and suspicion between them.

The heterodox sects which clung to the fringes of Islam were in a more ambiguous position. Officially they were regarded as parts of the general body of Islam; but in fact the cleavage between them and the orthodox was almost as great as that between Moslems and Christians, and they like the Christians were usually left to direct their internal affairs in accordance with customary law and the precepts of their religions.

5

Since for Moslems and Christians alike consciousness of belonging to a religious community was the basis of political and social obligation, both were very conscious of not belonging to other communities; and the sense of distinctiveness led easily to suspicion and dislike. This was true also of every Christian sect in its relations with the others, for each sect formed a separate 'millet'; and of the orthodox Moslems in their relations with the heterodox. Difference of sect was

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria 101

no less important an element in the common consciousness than difference of religion.

It may be, indeed, that the religious doctrines to which the communities adhered were not in all cases the fundamental cause of their distinctiveness; that when these doctrines were first preached certain elements in the population already felt themselves in various ways and for various reasons different from the peoples among whom they lived and by whom they were dominated; and that they adopted the new doctrines as an expression of their distinctiveness. Whatever its origin, a sect once founded tended to become a closed community very conscious of its difference from the surrounding world: a difference which revealed itself not only in religious beliefs but also in customs and traditions. The sect persisted as a social entity even after the impulse of affirmation which gave it birth had died away. To leave one's sect was to leave one's whole world, and to live without loyalties, the protection of a community, the consciousness of solidarity and the comfort of normality.

6

Islam gave the traditional society of Syria its dominant creed, its explicit moral code and its political organization. Its language and literature and its images of heroism and human grandeur came from the Arabian desert.

The way of life of the Beduin has deeply influenced Islam and been as deeply influenced by it, but the two are distinct. It is a way of life which has developed in order to meet the needs of the nomadic existence, an existence of the utmost bareness, insecurity, homelessness and poverty. It has alone made that existence tolerable and given it dignity and even a certain splendour. For it the cardinal virtues are courage and the other martial qualities; hospitality without limit or thought of recompense; loyalty to one's family and tribe; and reverence for the transmitted wisdom of the community, embodied in tribal customs and traditions and in a code of honour. The life of the Beduin has no room for subtleties and doubts, and would be wholly barren of culture were it not for the Arab love of language, of story and of poetry.

The Arabian desert produced not only a moral system, but also a social organization. It was based upon the clan and

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MAI LEBANON ML1

(iii) The Circassians, who are by origin Moslems from the Caucasus. They fled from their homes after the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, and were settled by the Ottoman Government along the western edge of the Syrian Desert, to prevent the encroachments of the tribes. There are about 20,000 of them.

(iv) There are also a number of Yazidis, adherents of a secret dualistic religion and with a dialect of their own; but they are only a small offshoot of the main community in Iraq.

5

With these exceptions the minorities are Arabic-speaking and have lived in Syria and Lebanon for many generations; akin to the majority in many things, their basic difference is one of religious loyalties.

The general nature of the problem which they raise can be stated briefly. It is a product of two factors: first, of certain traditional differences which linger on in a new age; secondly, of the varying relations of the different elements in the population to the process of Westernization.

Serious at any time, religious differences were made more serious in the past by the prevalence of the theocratic view of life; differences of religious belief involved different political loyalties and principles of social conduct. The theocratic view was the basis of the 'millet-system', which, while it allowed a certain autonomy to the minorities, also increased the completeness of their separation from one another and from the majority. This was particularly true of those minorities of which a large proportion lived compactly in a single area; they came to regard themselves, if they had not always regarded themselves, as a 'peculiar people' linked by no moral or political tie with their neighbours. To complete their isolation there was added the memory of injustices, real or imagined, which they had suffered at the hands of the majority.

The persistence of these divergences in the present age adds a new and complicating factor to the problem of Westernization. It is not only that different communities have different paths to tread if they are to Westernize themselves: for example, the problems of social organization

11: Hourani 5-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MD1 LEBANON MC1

among the Druzes of Jebel Druze are different from those among the Lebanese Christians. The growth of the Arab nationalist movement has also affected the problem of minorities. It is true that in principle Arab nationalism need not and indeed should not involve a problem of religious minorities. But there are several reasons why at the present day it does involve such a problem. The first reason is to be found in the immaturity of political thinking among the Arabs. Arabism, as the previous chapter made clear, has not yet determined its relationship with Islam; more generally, neither majority nor minorities have yet faced the problem of the connexion between religion and the State. Thus there is a tendency for many of the nationalists, although not their most thoughtful leaders, to regard members of the minorities as imperfect Arabs because they are heterodox Moslems or not Moslems at all; equally there is a tendency among the minorities to be suspicious of nationalism as a movement for unrestrained Sunni ascendancy. Among some of the Christian minorities there is a further tendency to regard the West as their spiritual home, to which they can belong in a way in which they could never belong to the Arabo-Islamic world to whose fringes they have so long clung.

The mutual suspicion has been increased in the last twenty-five years by the bad relations which have existed between the nationalists and the French authorities. In these years Arab nationalism has been largely a movement of opposition to France. Those whose nationalism is still coloured by religion draw from that an additional reason for suspecting the Christians as being of the same religion as the French. But quite apart from religious prejudice, suspicion has inevitably been aroused by the long-standing attachment of certain of the Christian communities to France. Many of the nationalists believe that this attachment has been used by her as an instrument in a policy of dividing, weakening and in other ways opposing the nationalist movement. Those of the minorities who have been used unwittingly in this way they regard as obstacles to the achievement of their aspirations; those who have lent themselves willingly to it they regard as traitors to the national cause.

Even when members of minorities become Arab nationalists, as many of them do, they often wear their nationalism with a difference. It is not only that they tend to emphasize

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MD 1
LEBANON MEI

points in the nationalist programme other than those which are emphasized by the Moslems; they also sometimes conceive of themselves as having a special duty to perform in the movement. For example, some of the Christian nationalists regard it as their task to mediate Western civilization to the Arabs. This sense of a special duty makes for difference, if not for opposition.

6

This much can be said of the whole of Syria and Lebanon. But if a more detailed analysis is to be attempted, Lebanon must be separated from Syria. While in Syria, and in the Levant States taken as a whole, the Sunni Moslems have an overwhelming preponderance, in Lebanon neither they nor any other community forms an absolute majority of the population, and the number of Christians of different sects is slightly greater than that of Moslems, orthodox and heterodox.

Inside Lebanon also a distinction must be made. As will be described later,[1] the Lebanese Republic of to-day was formed after the First World War, by the addition to the pre-war autonomous Sanjaq of Lebanon, which consisted mainly of Mount Lebanon itself, of certain towns and outlying districts. In the former, the population is almost entirely Christian (mainly Maronite) and Druze. The additions included the coastal towns of Tripoli, Beirut, Saida (Sidon) and Sur (Tyre), and the districts of the Biqa' in the east and Jebel Amil in the south. In the towns the population is largely Sunni Moslem, although there are also numerous Shi'is, Greek Catholics and Orthodox and Armenians (mainly in Beirut). In the Biqa' and Jebel Amil the Shi'i Moslems are predominant, but here again there are large Greek Orthodox and Catholic and other communities.

In Mount Lebanon the majority is Christian, but the Druze community is large and strong enough to have played at least an equal and sometimes a greater part in the history of the Mountain. Thus the sectarian composition of Mount Lebanon is very different from that of the rest of the Mandated Territories. To a great extent also its history has diverged from that of other parts of geographical Syria. This has given rise to a specific Lebanese tradition. It is a tradition of asylum: remnants of sects and tribes, driven for one reason or another

[1] See Chapter IX, p. 172.

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MD1

and certain tribes among them persuaded to settle on the land. ooo

Thus in the years between the two wars the Jazirah was almost entirely resettled by immigrant groups. The greater part of the population are still Arab Moslems, but very many of these are nomads; and of the settled population, which in 1938 was estimated at 103,000, more than 20,000 are Christians, while probably a majority and certainly a large proportion of the remainder are Kurds.[1]

Among the settled population the proportion of those whose native language is not Arabic is much larger than in any other part of Syria. Split up between a large number of sects and peoples, none of whom dominates the rest, and lacking the element of stability which an old-established population would give, the Jazirah presents a complex problem, the nature of which is determined by a large number of factors: tension between Christians and Moslems, and between Arabs and Kurds; the everlasting conflict between the Beduin and the sedentary population; and interference by Turkey and Iraq from just across the frontier.

Here, as in Jebel Druze and Latakia, there has long been a conflict between the greater number of French officials, who insist that what the district primarily needs is good and special administration such as the Syrian Government could not give it, and the nationalists, who wish to make it clear from the beginning that the Jazirah is an integral part of Syria. Of the inhabitants, the Arab Moslems are for the most part nationalists, while many of the Arab and other Christians oppose them and claim autonomy. Opposition comes also from those Kurds who demand autonomy and who are being increasingly influenced by Kurdish nationalism. The Kurds have a tribal organization, the most important tribal groups being the Barazi and Milli; and most of them have no political loyalty except to the tribe. The majority are opposed to Turkey and frightened of Arab rule, although there is a continuous process of assimilation to the Arabs; and some of them have a superficial attachment to France. It is only fairly recently that a nationalist movement has arisen among them, directed by the intellectuals in Damascus and elsewhere and organized in the 'Hoybun' party. It aims at the

[1] Another estimate for 1937 was as follows: Arab Moslems 41,900; Kurds 81,450; Christians 31,050; others 4,150; Total 158,550. To this should be added 8,000 Assyrians.

11: Hourani S-4 (no date) 1946 MD1 Syria MD1

social and economic characteristics. For example, the Christians accounted in 1938 for about 32 per cent of the total school population, and for an even larger proportion of pupils in the secondary schools. It is important to notice that 32 per cent of the Christian students attended schools controlled mainly by foreign Christian missions, 61 per cent attended private schools mostly maintained by religious communities, and only 7 per cent attended official schools.[1] Since the education given in the first two types of school is sectarian, Christians are receiving a different kind of education from Moslems, a far larger proportion of whom attend official institutions.

Educational differences are reinforced by social ones. The Christians still form a social unit, or rather a series of interconnected units, of which the relations with the Moslem community are peaceful and correct but not in normal circumstances cordial. This is especially true of the older people brought up under the Ottoman régime. The introduction of freer social customs from the West, the spread of education and the growth of the idea of nationalism are helping to make the young less conscious than their elders of their confessional loyalties, and may in the end succeed in breaking down the barriers between the sects and religions. Economically, also, the Christians tend to constitute a more predominantly urban community than the Moslems, with all the differences which that involves, but there is a Christian peasantry in certain parts of the country, similar in many ways to the Moslem peasantry.

In spite of incidents like those of 1860, on the whole the history of Syria has not been one of religious persecution on a large scale, and the Christians have enjoyed long periods of toleration, although not of equality with the Moslems. Such toleration has existed partly because of the long residence of Christians in the country, partly because they were not numerous enough to constitute a serious threat to Moslem supremacy, and partly because clergy and laity alike were for the most part Arabic in language and culture.

On the whole the growth of the nationalist movement has not had unfavourable consequences for the Christians. Individual Christians have played an important part in the movement in Syria as elsewhere. Nor is it merely isolated

[1] Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, *Rapport, 1938*, p. 91.